

# Diabetes: the Gateway Disease

By Stephanie  
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## The head-to-toe effects of this all-too-common disease

**D**iabetes may start in the pancreas, but its effects can quickly spread throughout the body. Keeping the disease under tight control—with diet, exercise, weight loss and medication—can help keep stave off its head-to-toe side effects. That’s what these two Baylor patients learned when they took their health into their own hands.

Ammie Gordon had a strong family history of diabetes and battled symptoms of gestational diabetes when she was pregnant. Facing increasingly abnormal blood sugar levels, the 34-year-old mother of three from Granbury turned to weight-loss surgery to help control both her weight and her diabetes symptoms. (See “Curing Diabetes?”)

Boyd Wise, 58, of Waxahachie, was diagnosed with diabetes in August 2008. He enrolled in Baylor’s 10-hour diabetes management program and within three months got his blood sugar levels under good control. He improved his diet and started exercising three to four times a week. He continues to check his blood sugar twice daily and takes a small daily dose of Glucovance™. “I work in the medical field. I see people with diabetes not doing what the doctor asks them to do—I see what could happen,” he says.



### Curing Diabetes?

For people struggling with both obesity and diabetes, weight-loss surgery may offer a something akin to a cure. It worked for Ammie Gordon, who was taking a drug called metformin to help control her blood sugar levels. After undergoing bariatric surgery at Baylor All Saints Medical Center at Fort Worth in August 2008, her blood sugar is normal. “I’m not on any medication,” she says. “I used to feel

dizzy, sick and shaky when my blood sugar dropped. That doesn’t happen anymore.”

Nick Nicholson, M.D., a bariatric surgeon on the medical staff at Baylor Regional Medical Center at Plano, says, “It’s not uncommon for people to be off all diabetes medications within three months [after surgery]. Some people don’t need medication less than a week after bypass surgery.”

A study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found that people who had gastric bypass surgery reduced their risk of dying from diabetes-related causes by 92 percent. “The bottom line is, as things stand right now, the only solution we have for diabetes in obese patients is weight-loss surgery—it’s the only effective treatment,” Dr. Nicholson says.

Ammie Gordon is living life to the fullest now that her diabetes is under control.

Here's a look at the effects diabetes, left unchecked, can have on your body:

**BRAIN** Depression strikes 15 percent to 20 percent of people with diabetes, making it difficult to follow the healthy living recommendations that help keep the condition well-managed.

**EYES** High blood glucose levels (and high blood pressure, common in people with diabetes) can damage the tiny, sensitive blood vessels in the eyes, leading to vision loss and blindness.

**HEART** "People with diabetes are twice as likely to develop heart disease and stroke than those without diabetes," says Qing Jia, M.D., an endocrinologist on the medical staff at Baylor Medical Center at Garland. They also tend to develop these problems at younger ages than other people.

**STOMACH** Poorly controlled diabetes can lead to damage in the nerves that help control digestion. Gastroparesis occurs when food lingers in the stomach longer than it should, causing heartburn, bloating, nausea and vomiting.

**DIGESTIVE SYSTEM** Nerve problems caused by diabetes can cause changes in digestion, bowel and bladder function, as well as urinary tract infections.

**KIDNEYS** Diabetes is the most common cause of kidney failure, responsible for 44 percent of cases. With kidney failure, the body cannot rid itself of waste. While kidney failure builds gradually over many years, ultimately people need either dialysis or a kidney transplant to treat it.

**SEXUAL ORGANS** Both men and women with diabetes may see changes in their sexual response, and between 35 percent and 50 percent of men with diabetes develop erectile dysfunction.

**LEGS** Diabetic nerve damage can lead to pain in the thighs, hips and buttocks and cause weakness in the legs.

**HANDS AND FEET** About 60 percent to 70 percent of people with diabetes develop nerve damage, most commonly in the hands and feet, causing pain or loss of sensation, the latter of which can result in open sores, ulcers and infections of which the patient is unaware.

Like so many medical conditions, early detection is key to controlling diabetes. The condition is prevalent—13 percent of American adults have it, and 40 percent of them don't know it. Another 57 million have pre-diabetes and are at high risk for developing full-blown diabetes. Ask your doctor if your blood sugar levels should be checked—the American Diabetes Association recommends routine screening for people age 45 and older. ●



## Sweet Success

Hear more about how Ammie Gordon took control of her diabetes. Watch her video at [BaylorHealth.com/mystory](http://BaylorHealth.com/mystory).

You also can take a quiz to assess your diabetes risk and learn about smart food choices at [BaylorHealth.com/mystory](http://BaylorHealth.com/mystory).

## REACHING OUT TO THE COMMUNITY

Diabetes can be a tough disease. When not managed effectively, it causes damage to the blood vessels that leads to long-term complications, such as heart disease, stroke, kidney failure, nerve damage, amputation and blindness.

"Managing diabetes is easier when people follow a healthy diet, exercise, lose weight, take their medications and keep their appointments," says Priscilla Hollander, M.D., Ph.D., an endocrinologist on the medical staff at Baylor University Medical Center at Dallas and medical director of the Ruth Collins Diabetes Center.

But that can be difficult, especially for those who lack health insurance or reliable transportation. For Baylor Dallas, it's a priority to reach out to the community to help all people with diabetes get the services they need.

Diabetes is more prevalent among Hispanics and African Americans, which is why every August Baylor Dallas participates in the Viva Dallas! Hispanic Expo, providing free blood glucose screenings and physician referrals. Baylor Health Care System and the City of Dallas are launching the Diabetes Health and Wellness Institute at the Juanita J. Craft Recreation Center. Scheduled to open in 2010, this specialty clinic will improve care for people with diabetes in South Dallas.

Whether it's working with schools to identify kids at risk for diabetes or teaching a nutrition class, "our goal is to provide early education and treatment so more people can learn to take care of themselves, manage their disease effectively and avoid serious complications that can be associated with diabetes," says Jan Burke, R.N., CDE, manager of the Ruth Collins Diabetes Center at Baylor Dallas. *By Deborah Paddison*



## Know the Score

If you are fasting, your blood glucose level should be between 70 and 100. To learn about diabetes programs and classes offered at Baylor Dallas, call **1-800-4BAYLOR** or visit [BaylorHealth.com/dallasdiabetes](http://BaylorHealth.com/dallasdiabetes).